

Department of Health and Human Services

**OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

**HOMELESS FAMILIES AND
ACCESS TO AFDC**



OCTOBER 1992

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To examine homeless families' accessibility to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits.

BACKGROUND

At the request of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, we began to examine the issue of homeless families and access to AFDC. The assumption was that many homeless families were not accessing AFDC, and that the application process in particular caused significant problems for homeless families.

We interviewed directors and caseworkers from 24 emergency family shelters in 8 cities of varying size and in varying locations. We conducted an extensive review of literature and spoke with over 50 people from Federal, State, and local governments, academia and professional organizations, non-profit advocacy groups, and providers.

FINDINGS

Most homeless families are already on AFDC.

Sixty-nine percent of all homeless families interviewed in a related OIG study were receiving AFDC benefits at the time of the interview. Recent literature is consistent with this finding. For the 31 percent who were not receiving AFDC, there were legitimate reasons, such as employment of a parent or receipt of other income. A few had applied for AFDC but had not yet received benefits.

Very few shelter residents are first time applicants to AFDC.

Fifteen of 24 shelter respondents report 10 percent or less (including none) of their total population as first time applicants to the AFDC program. Even for those shelters reporting a more than 10 percent proportion, that proportion often translated into one, or less than one, family a month as first time applicants to the AFDC program.

Most shelters respondents said first time applicants do not have problems waiting for their first AFDC check because the shelter takes care of their basic needs.

Overall, 14 of 24 shelters report that the processing time does not pose a problem for first time AFDC applicants because their shelter takes care of the residents' basic needs. Shelter staff often act as advocates on behalf of homeless families for a variety of benefits and services. They also said that AFDC caseworkers respond better to clients who have such an advocate.